

Inaugural Speech by Mr. G.K.Vasan, Hon'ble Minister (Independent Charge), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Distinguished delegates from all the seven SAARC Member States, Mr. Rajiv Chander, Director, SAARC Secretariat, My colleagues Dr. Ramesh Chandra Panda, Special Secretary of my Ministry, Dr. S.K.Nath, Director General, Central Statistical Organisation, Dr.K.V.Rao, Director General and CEO, National Sample Survey Organisation and Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely delighted being amongst you in this august gathering of SAARCSTAT, which has just completed the first year of its existence a week back. This is an auspicious occasion indeed. Ladies and Gentlemen, The First Meeting of Heads of Statistical Organisation at Kolkata during May 26-27, 2005 had fulfilled the dream of creation of SAARCSTAT into a reality. This reality has given the opportunity to all of us to get ourselves involved and accept the challenge – the challenge on how to fight for the cause of betterment of this region- both from social and economic angle. The Statisticians of region therefore have an important role since it is you who could provide the “inputs” needed for any developmental process.

The biggest challenge of this Region is how to eradicate poverty. By poverty I do not mean the “income” poverty alone but non-income poverty like the human development component of it, the social development component of it, the gender development component of it – to mention a few.

This calls for technical inputs, information inputs and conceptual inputs for proper implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP). We have seen that mere macro-level indicators can not help the PRS programme and therefore, the SAARC Statisticians may look for development of small area estimates.

In this respect statistical classifications play an important role- be it a social classification or economic classification. These provide a standard tool for uniform data collection, data analysis and regional and international comparability. I am happy to note that the Kolkata-meet recognized this issue and set up a Technical Sub-group for harmonization of Statistical classifications with Pakistan as nodal coordinator. My special thanks to the delegates from Pakistan for taking up this important responsibility. I am sure that the experts present here will deliberate on the issue on this most important issue of classifications urgently needed for regional data comparability.

I find another important issue which will be discussed in the two-day deliberation is on inter-regional comparability of system of National Accounts. National Income is recognized and treated as the most important macro-level indicator to judge the economic progress of a country and this has a strong bearing on any PRS programme. On the other hand, there is a wide social and economic disparity in this region . Thus, this issue of

comparable SNA needs serious discussions and I hope that you being the subject specialists will be able to come out with a positive solution.
I congratulate Sri Lanka for being the nodal coordinator in SNA.

Let me stop here and formally inaugurate the workshop and wish the workshop both successful and purposeful.